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ABSTRACT

Among the characteristics which set Bordeaux French apart from Standard French are the rules governing the behavior of its mid-vowels. These rules are much simpler and more extensive (in that they also apply to unstressed vowels) than in Standard French. Their application is, however, systematically conditioned by the presence or absence of word boundaries, a fact not recognized for Standard French where it has been obscured by a number of conditioning factors not operating in Bordeaux French. Another conditioning factor is the presence in the syllable following that of any mid-vowel of "e caduc," whose effect is the same whether it is elided or not. For this feature, Bordeaux French and Standard French show remarkable unity in spite of marked superficial differences. A sociolinguistic investigation reveals that the mid-vowel adjustment rules of Bordeaux French constitute an area where "standardization" is least successful, except for a few members among the high social classes. This can probably be attributed to the degree of abstraction of the process involved (standardization is more successfully achieved when a straightforward, across-the-board phonetic replacement is involved) and to the complexity of the target system (Standard French). (Author/TL)

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Aspects of Bordeaux French Phonology

This paper is a preliminary report on a study conducted during the spring and fall of 1974 in the city of Bordeaux, South West France.[1] The purpose of the study is to present a phonological description of the regional variety of French spoken in that city, paying attention to variation conditioned by sociological factors. The reasons for conducting such a study are the following: until recently very little space has been devoted in the literature to anything but Standard French[2], and in spite of the marked contrasts it offers with its northern counterpart, Southern French has been particularly neglected. Furthermore, very little attention has been paid to variation in speech communities and this study which included 100 interviews was geared to focus on this particular aspect. The following constitutes an attempt to analyze the main phonological characteristics of what would be considered by most to constitute typical Bordeaux French.

At the outset, one can mention briefly some features which will not be dealt with in detail here but which should be part of any contrastive study between standard and Southern French.

In Bordeaux, no distinction exists between a front [a] and a back [ɑ]

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and the following pairs are not distinguished:

(1)	patte	pâte
	tache	tâche
	ta	tas
	ma	mât
	lache	lâche
		etc.

Conversely, a distinction which is fast disappearing in Standard French, is still very much alive in Bordeaux French where [ɛ̃] and [œ̃]are nearly always kept apart:

(2)	brin	brun
	lin	l'un
		lundi
		etc.

Finally, schwa (or so-called mute e is only elided in one environment --when it is followed by a vowel within the same group. Otherwise, it is pronounced by most speakers, and actualized as [ö] .

e.g., (3) une toute petite chemise

[ünö tutö pötitö ʃömizö]

One of the most interesting features of Bordeaux French is the behavior of its mid vowels. They follow what has been called by Delattre and then Valdman the Loi de Position, which has been summarized in the following formula:

$$(4) \qquad [\text{mid}] \overset{V}{\rightarrow} \begin{cases} [\text{higher}] & / - \begin{cases} \# \\ CV \end{cases} \\ [\text{lower}] & / - C \end{cases}$$

i.e., a mid vowel is of the higher variety when it occurs in a free syllable and of the lower variety when it occurs in a checked syllable.[3] Thus, in final position, the following examples give an idea of the differences resulting from this state of affairs between Standard French and Bordeaux French:[4]

(5)

Mid Front Unrounded		Mid Front Rounded		Mid Back Rounded	
[e]	[ɛ]	[ö]	[œ]	[o]	[ɔ]
fée	mer	pneu	peur	beau	bord
* fait	fer	feu	soeur	pot	port
* mais	sept	queue	coeur	seau	sort
* après	sec	noeud	leur	lot	lors
* lait	bec		*émeute	haut	hors
* très	bel		*Polyeucte		roc
	cette		*feutre		hotte
	messe		*heureuse		*hôte
	père		*Maubeuge		cotte
	bègue		*danseuse		*côte
	celle		jeune		*chose
	plèbe		*jeûne		*rose
					*aube
					*haute

The rule applies no less regularly to unstressed or non final syllables, e.g.,

(6) [e]	[ɛ]	[ö]	[œ]	[o]	[ɔ]
maison	perdu	heureux	meurtrier	poser	border
effluve	exagéré	heureuse	heureusement	politique	postillon

Some of the words listed above, however, are not adequately accounted for by rule (4). Thus, in mère, heureuse, and côte, the final -e is very often pronounced as a full-fledged vowel ([ö]) in Bordeaux, i.e.,

(7) [mɛrö] [örœzö] [kɔtö]

The same situation is encountered when the syllable containing schwa is in word-medial position,

e.g.,

(8) événement heureusement fausseté.

[evɛnömã] [örœzömã] [fɔsöte]

For the words listed in (7) and (8), the pronunciation of the underlined mid vowels remains the same whether the schwa in the next syllable is pronounced or not. This suggests that rule (4) must be rewritten to include schwa[5] (and not only syllable structure conditions) in its environment:

$$(9) \quad [+\text{mid}] \rightarrow [+\text{low}] \quad / \quad \underset{V}{_} \; C_1 \begin{Bmatrix} \# \\ C \\ \ə \end{Bmatrix}$$

that is, a mid vowel is of the lower variety if it occurs in a checked syllable, or if it is followed by a syllable containing schwa.[6]

Two sets of examples, however, seem to contradict the Law of Position in Bordeaux French. The future (and conditional) forms of first conjugation verbs whose radical ends in oC are often pronounced with [o] and not [ɔ] when schwa is elided (e.g., il donnera [idonra].[7] On the other hand, if schwa is pronounced (as [ö]), only the form with [ɔ] is possible, e.g.,

(10) a. donnera [donra] ~ [dɔnöra]

b. posera [pozra] ~ [pɔzöra]

c. collera [kolra] ~ [kɔlöra]

d. votera [votra] ~ [vɔtöra]

This suggests some kind of restructuring and the existence of two variants with different underlying forms and syllabic structures.[8] Thus, the form [dɔn(ö)ra] is in keeping with the Law of Position, but [donra] only is if it is viewed as containing a syllable cut between o and the final consonant of the radical - in this case n. Although such a cut presents no difficulty whenever the last consonant of the radical is an occlusive, or [f] and [v], (e.g., il votera [vo-tra]), for all other consonants it yields syllable initial clusters which do not occur in post-pausal position (e.g., [do-nra]). The syllable division yielding such clusters must be rejected if one is to follow Pulgram's rules of syllabification, unless the permissible clusters are considered to be not "occlusive, or [f], [v] plus [r]", but "any consonant plus [r]".[9] One could argue, however, that such a generalization is to be rejected because it conceals the fact that all the deviating forms

belong to the same morphological category.[10]

Although this closed pronunciation of the vowel in future forms of first conjugation verbs is mostly characteristic of o, similar examples are also found for e. Whereas il achètera is usually pronounced [ilašɛtra], cédera is more often [sedra], thus being similar to mettre - il mettra [i(l) metra], for which the future infix is -r-, not -er-. These two examples point to the role of spelling, a factor of some importance for the vowel e which often carries written accents, but of no relevance for the vowel o.

Whatever the timbre of the mid-vowel, schwa is usually deleted in the first conjugation future forms. The fact that forms like achèterai with [ɛ] in a surface free syllable are common, suggests that the Law of Position must operate at a fairly high level (or early in the derivation). It must apply before the deletion of schwa; otherwise there would be no way of distinguishing between the penultimate vowels in

(11) a. achètera and

b. pétrin

What is suggested by achèterai and pétrin, i.e., that the Law of Position applies early in the derivation, at any rate before e - deletion, ties in with what emerges from the second set of apparently exceptional forms. Consider the following syntagms:

(12) a. cette amie

b. sept amis

c. ces tamis

In order to obtain the correct phonetic forms, one must apply the Law of Position before deleting word boundaries,[11] i.e. at a point in the derivation where word boundaries also function as syllable boundaries. Following this principle, the different pronunciations of the element bon in un bon arrangement and un bonhomme are readily understandable. In the first example, o occurs in a checked syllable (/œ̃#bon#arãžömã/) and is realised as a lower mid vowel ([œ̃bɔnarãžömã]). In the second example, o occurs in a free syllable. (/œ̃#bonom/) and is realized as a higher mid vowel ([œ̃bonɔm]). Whereas bonhomme is represented as a single unit in standard orthography, there as cases where conventional spelling obscures the fact that two items are actually fused together semantically and syntactically and must be viewed as one signle word.[12] Thus, whereas the adjective bonne is usually pronounced [bɔn] when it functions as a separate lexical item, it is realized as [bon-] in the syntagms de bonne heure 'early' and bonne amie 'sweetheart', - whose meaning is different from the sum of the semantic values of the constituting elements, e.g.,

(13) a. C'est une bonne heure pour travailler

[bɔn.œ́rö]

'It is a good time to work'

b. Il s'est levé de bonne heure (cf. St F [bɔnœr]

[bɔ́nœrö]

'He got up early'

(14) a. C'est une bonne amie de la famille

[bɔnami]

'She is a good friend of the family'

b. C'est la bonne amie de mon frère[13]

[bonami]

'She is my brother's sweetheart'

Similarly, the adjective jeune which is usually pronounced [ˇzœn], is realized as [ˇzön-] in the syntagm jeune homme which functions as a single noun and can be preceded by an adjective, e.g.,

(15) a. C'est un homme jeune

[ˇzœn]

'He is a young man'

b. C'est un beau jeune homme[14]

[ˇzönɔm]

'He is a handsome young man'

When used as an adverb or a conjunction, comme is pronounced [kɔm], but it is realized as [kom-] in the syntagm comme il faut functioning as an adverb or an adjective meaning 'well' or 'nice, good', e.g.,

(16) a. Il le fait comme on le lui a appris

[kɔm õ]

'He does it as he was taught'

b. Fais-le comme il faut[15]

[komifo]

'Do it well'

The same vocalic alternation resulting from the application of the Law of Position within a word, but not across a word boundary is also illustrated in the following example. When asked where the "lycée Michel Montaigne" was situated, most informants replied:

(17) a. Cours Victor Hugo

[viktorügo]

thus indicating that the syntagm Victor Hugo was treated as one single word. On the other hand, mention of the famous poet was accompanied by the pronunciation

(17) b. Victor Hugo

[viktɔr ügo]

i.e., with the first and the last names kept as two separate elements.

Some other items are not yet definitely established as single units, their individual components being still transparent, in meaning and in form. Thus, baise-en-ville (a small purse that men carry looped over the wrist) is most often [bɛzãvil] - the name being meant to be humorous with its sexual connctation is not likely to become easily devoid of the original meaning of its separate elements. But in spite of this, it is sometimes pronounced [bezãvil] in fast, informal conversation, or when the speaker is only concerned with designating the object, without adding any connotation, as in the following frustrated remark of a man late for work:

(18) Je ne sais pas ce que j'ai fait de mon baise-en-ville!

[bezãvil]

'I don't know what I have done with my purse!'

Another item not always felt as a single unit is chauffe-eau, most often heard as [ʃɔfo], but not infrequently as [ʃofo].

All the above examples show the transformation of a checked syllable in the isolated word, into a free one in the new compound unit, through carry-over of a final consonant to the next vowel. But the opposite case also exists as shown by the departing utterance au revoir (another case of re-structuring without /ə/):

(19) au revoir[ɔr-vwar]

(cf au retour[o rötur] which must be analyzed as /o#rətur/).

Although syllable divisions coïncide with word boundaries, the Law of Position applies over morpheme boundaries,[16] e.g.,

(20) a. je cède[sɛd]

b. nous cédons[sedõ]

In the case of liaison, the liaison consonant is treated as belonging to the second word, e.g.,

(21) a. mon premier camion[prömjekamjõ]

b. mon premier ami[prömje-rami]

The enchaînement consonant, on the contrary, goes with the first word[17], e.g.,

(22) ma première amie[prömjɛr-ami].

This example provides justification for the distinction made by Delattre, Durant and Malmberg between liaison and enchaînement, and supports their claim that in French liaison and enchaînement consonants are characterized by different articulations.[18] This distinction is

only made more dramatic in Bordeaux French by the application of the Law of Position resulting in different vowels, whereas it is usually obscured in Standard French, e.g.,

(23) a. le premier

[ɛ]

b. mon premier camion

[prəmjɛkamjõ]

c. mon premier ami

[prəmjɛrami]

although it still occurs in some items:

(24) a. un sot

[o]

b. un sot enfant

[so-tãfã]

c. not *[sɔt-ãfã]

d. but une sotte aventure

[sɔt-avãtür]

Standardization and the Law of Position

We are therefore faced with a general principle which applies very regularly in Bordeaux French, but only partially in Standard French where the higher and lower mid vowels are not completely in complementary distribution.

Standard French, however, constitutes the model that certain slices of the population attempt to imitate. Most people --among those who do attempt to standardize their pronunciation-- are aware of certain features differentiating the two dialects. They know for example, that they must delete schwa, that the timbre of their nasal vowels must be altered and they are fairly successful in these areas. The Law of Position, however, is one of the least favorable areas for standardization. Tabulation of the date contained in the interviews conducted in Bordeaux reveals that the great majority of manual and white collar workers do not seem to be aware of any difference between their dialect and the Standard variety, as far as the Law of Position is concerned. They are not aware for example of any difference between their rose [roz] and the Standard [roz]. Of all the informants interviewed in this study, only four (one doctor, one top executive, one professor and one university student majoring in language and linguistics) seem to have mastered the intricacies of the Standard system. Among people who are aware of any difference, most can only think in terms of isolated words --those which have been pointed out to them. For example, one high-school teacher was convinced she had 'a very bad accent', and confessed that she had been told to say cause [o], rose [o], but then went on to use the word sauve with [o] (in Il est déjà onze heures, il faut que je me sauve 'It's already eleven, I have to go').

Subjective reaction tests conducted during the interviews also indicate non awareness of the problem. No pattern emerges from the tests conducted among the lower classes and there the only criterion of evaluation seems to be the voice of the speaker. More agreement is perceived in the tests conducted among upper class informants, but only six showed clearly

that they distinguished between those following the Standard French version of the Law of Position, and those following its Bordeaux counterpart.

The lack of success in standardization where the Law of Position is concerned is hardly surprising. Contrarily to variables where a straightforward phonetic replacement is involved (e.g. [ɔ̃] → [õ]), the Law of Position involves more complex statements and constitutes a more abstract process, as reflected by the fact that, in a grammar of French, it occurs at a fairly high level, at any rate before the deletion of word boundaries. Moreover, standardization for Bordeaux French speakers would involve the following complications:

(26)

Bordeaux French	Parisian French
$\begin{bmatrix} \overset{\vee}{+\text{ mid}} \\ -\text{ rounded} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow [+\text{ high}] \text{ /----- \#}$	delete--words ending in such a vowel must be learnt.
$\overset{V}{\begin{bmatrix} +\text{ mid} \\ -\text{rounded} \end{bmatrix}} \rightarrow [-\text{high}] \text{ /-----C} \begin{Bmatrix} \# \\ C \\ ə \end{Bmatrix}$	idem
$\overset{V}{\begin{bmatrix} +\text{ mid} \\ +\text{rounded} \end{bmatrix}} \rightarrow [+\text{high}] \text{ /----- \#}$	/----- # /-----[z]
$\overset{V}{\begin{bmatrix} +\text{mid} \\ +\text{rounded} \end{bmatrix}} \rightarrow [-\text{high}] \text{ /----} \begin{Bmatrix} C \cdot \# \\ CC \\ Cə \end{Bmatrix}$	/-----[r] for other consonants, learn each word separetely

This produces rather incongruous results, namely speakers who approach the Standard variety with respect to some features (e.g., nasal vowel timbre, mute *e* deletion), but retain completely the Bordeaux type of mid-vowel distribution. In spite of the ever increasing influence of radio and television it is unlikely that the regional varieties of French will completely give way to the Standard dialect. Even if all speakers were willing to standardize their speech --which is far from being the case[19] -- it is likely that standardization would be restricted to straightforward phonetic correspondences, but would fail to modify rules appearing at a deeper level of the grammar, particularly when the required modification involves a complication in the shape of addition of environments to the structural description of the rule.

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CANADA

Notes

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[2] Standard French is viewed here as the variety spoken by "la bonne société parisienne", and corresponds to the "descriptions et les règles données par les phonéticiens qui font autorité et qui ont fait des recherches sérieuses pour fixer un usage qu'ils ont jugé dominant parmi les groupes sociaux en question." See Malmberg (1969:11-12).

[3] See Valdman (1972:475). For the establishment of syllable boundaries, see Pulgram (1964:131-2) and (1970:40-51).

[4] In (5), the items preceded by an asterisk are pronounced differently, i.e., not according to the Law of Position, in Standard French.

[5] Since schwa is usually pronounced in Bordeaux French and actualized as [ö], the question arises of how the speakers know, when confronted with the vowel [ö], whether it is a stable one, or one that could be deleted. The same question could be raised for Standard French, since schwa is not always elided. The difference, however, is that since elision occurs frequently in Parisian French, some vowels can be viewed as stable or never deleted, while other are viewed as [ö~ø]. This answer is a lot less convincing for Bordeaux French, particularly for the less sophisticated speakers who practically never delete schwa but still unerringly pronounce

(10) <u>événement</u> as [evɛnömã]

(cf <u>perdu</u> [pɛrdu])

but <u>déjeuner</u> as [deže̤ne]

It appears likely that the solution to this problem is a complex one and that the factors allowing the speaker-hearers to acquire or perceive the correct form (with [ö] or schwa) are numorous and not necessarily the same for all words or classes of words concerned.

[6] Dell (1973:210) postulates a similar environment for his E-adjustment rule. The restriction that schwa must occur at the end of a morpheme (idem: p. 211), justified when accounting for the alternation [ə], [e]/ [ɛ] , does not apply here, however, as shown by the word <u>événement</u> ([evɛn(ö)mã]). For the discrepancy between the spelling and the pronunciation of this word, see Malmberg (1969: 41).

7 In such forms, schwa was lost earlier than in other words, see Fouché (1967: 389-391). Syncopated forms of the future and the conditional were very frequent in the XVIth century (see Thurot, 1881: 151), i.e., at the time of the introduction of the French language in the provinces of Southern France (see Brun, 1923: 119-136).

8 An interesting example of restructuring is afforded by the word coquelicot, which presents the same type of alternation as the future forms mentioned above. In ordinary use coquelicot is pronounced [kɔkölikɔ], but in the song Gentil coquelicot where the deletion of schwa is required by the octosyllabic rhythm of the line ("Gentil coquelicot, Mesdames"), it is realized as [kokliko].

9 Such clusters were often eliminated through assimilation of their two elements and forms like dorray (<donray), amerra (<amenra), lairra (<laisra), etc. were frequent in the XVIth century. But they became obsolete in the XVIIIth century and were replaced by forms based on the infinitive, e.g., donnerai, amènera, laisserai. See Thurot (1881: 151-153).

10 It is not possible to test whether such a generalization would yield wrong results among items other than future forms since consonant sequences such as [sr], [nr], etc have normally been reduced and are only encountered in the verbal forms encountered here.

11 For the importance of word boundaries in French phonology, see Rochet (forthcoming).

12 For a set of procedures useful in identifying words, see R. Swaminathan (1973). It will be considered here that two elements separated by a blank in the orthographic representation can be viewed as a single unit when the meaning of the syntagm considered is different from the sum of the meaning of the two elements, and when this overall meaning is only possible when no additional items occur between the two elements in question.

13 The syntagm bonne amie (or bon ami) with this meaning is heard less frequently among the younger generations. Note that whereas additional items can be inserted between bonne and amie in (14) a. (e.g., une bonne et fidèle amie), this is impossible in (14) b. In this case, bonne amie functions as a noun and can be modified by an adjective, but not by an adverb, e.g., Il a une jolie bonne amie
*Il a une très bonne amie.
(the last sentence is possible, but with the meaning 'He has a very good friend' and bonne amie is then pronounced [bɔnami]).

Whereas a plural marker is added to both elements in (14) a., e.g.,

Ce sont de bonnes amies de la famille.
[bɔnözami]

it can only be added to the end of the whole syntagm in (14) b. e.g.,

Il a trois bonne amies (which should be spelled bonamies)
[bɔnami]

14 The plural of jeune homme, jeunes gens is usually preceded by des and not de (des jeunes gens), an indication that the syntagm is felt as a single noun, and not as a sequence adjective + noun.

15 Every loving mother in Bordeaux hopes that her daughter(s) will marry "un jeune homme comme il faut" [œ̃zönɔmökomifo].

16 This does not seem to be the case, however, when the morpheme boundary occurs not between verbal root and endings (as in cédons), but between prefix and root as in dépecer, dégeler, décevoir, dételer, prévenir, etc. where the first vowel is [e] in spite of the presence of schwa in the following syllable. It appears likely that such examples also reflect the influence of spelling which probably accounts for the pronunciation with [e] in items not containing a prefix, e.g., médecin [medösɛ̃], échelon [eʃölɔ̃] (cf. événement [evɛnömã], céleri [sɛlöri]).

17 For the distinction between liaison and enchaînement, see Delattre (1951: 26).

18 See respectively Delattre (loc.cit.), Durant (1936: 240), Malmberg (1944: 61-66).

19 An increasing number of speakers reject Standard French (or Parisian French) as a model and pride themselves in maintaining in their speech the features characteristic of Bordeaux French. A consequence of this attitude is felt on regional radio and television networks where announcers with a regional "accent" are now becoming accepted.

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